

OTHER BOOKS BY SRI GURDIAL MALLIK

SHORT STORIES OF PREMCHAND (*Translated from Hindi*)
HOUND OF THE HEART (*Poems*)

DIVINE DWELLERS IN THE DESERT.

GURDIAL MALLIK



NALANDA PUBLICATIONS

DHANNUR SIR P.M. ROAD
BOMBAY 1

COPYRIGHT

May 1949

NALANDA PUBLICATIONS COY.

Vasanta Kutir, Race Course Road

BARODA

Printed by S Viswanathan at the Central Art Press, 14, Singanna
Naick Street, Madras 1, and published by Utsava Parikh, Nalanda
Publications Company, Race Course Road, Baroda.
Baroda Government Order No. (D) 49/43, 1-11-47

DEDICATED

TO

MOTHER, FATHER AND FAMILY

AND TO

VIMA, MOTABHAI, USHA AND ATUL

Heartfelt gratitude is my only inexhaustible exchequer

G M.

A lover may hanker after this love or that love,
But at the last he is drawn to the KING of Love
However much we describe and explain Love,
When we fall in love we are ashamed of our words
Explanation by the tongue makes most things clear,
But Love unexplained is better.

RUMI

PREFACE

During the second term of the 1932-33 academic year at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, my revered teacher, the Poet Rabindranath Tagore, honoured me with an invitation to deliver a series of Extension Lectures on the Mystics of Sindh. I complied with his command—like wishes, despite my scanty knowledge of Sindhi literature, confining myself to a general, layman's (as against a specialized, scholar's) treatment of the subject. These lectures are now embodied in the book.

I have to express my heartfelt gratitude to the late Professor Jethmal Parsaram Gulrajani, who first introduced me to the tenets and teachings of Sindh Sufism, and on whose English translations of the songs and sayings of the mystics I have drawn freely.

I also thank Shrimati Sophia Wadia, Founder-Organiser of the P.E.N., All-India Centre, for graciously writing a Foreword and the Nalanda Publications for their unvarying courtesy and considerateness to me.

May 8, 1949.

G. M.

Joy ! Joy ! I triumph ! Now no more I know
Myself as simple me. I burn with LOVE.
The Centre is within me, and its wonder
Lies as a circle everywhere about me.
Joy ! Joy ! No mortal thought can fathom me.
I am the merchant and the pearl at once
Lo ! Time and space lie crouching at my feet,
Joy ! Joy ! When I would reveal in a rapture,
I plunge into myself and all things know.

ATTAR

FOREWORD

There being but ONE TRUTH, man requires but one church—the Temple of God within us, walled in by matter but penetrable by any one who can find the way; *the pure in heart see God.*

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

The Way of the Mystic lies through the heart. In the desert of this world the heart is the oasis. In that ever green and cool oasis the pilgrim Soul finds the comforting shade of charity immortal, the purifying stream of the waters of life, the nourishing bread of wisdom. But he alone who has the courage and the strength necessary to "come out from among them and be separate," to abandon the narrow grooves of organised religion and conventional orthodoxy, to seek within for the Divine, can enter the blessed and secure refuge, the chamber of his heart.

That entrance secures for him the vision beautiful of the oneness of all Life and thenceforth the mystic shares its splendour with all his fellow-travellers, giving abundantly of himself. He has seen Beauty inexpressible and now perceives its reflection in all forms of life. His songs praise the Divine as the Beautiful and their magic quality awakens in others the appreciation of the sweet side of life and renders them receptive to the peace which is harmony.

The author of these studies of the Sufi mystics of Sindh is himself richly endowed with the attributes of true love, humility, sweetness and charity. He writes with the understanding born of genuine sympathy and, against the background of an enlightening exposition of Sufism, which—as he rightly remarks—is not an "ism," he describes some of the mystic poets who lived and sang in the desert.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
WHAT IS SUFISM ?	.. 17
SUFISM IN SINDH	.. 29
SHAH LATIF	. 40
SACHAL	.. 54
SOME OHER MYSTICS OF SINDH	.. 68
SUFISM IN SINDH TODAY	. 72
SOME OF THE MYSTICS I HAVE MET	.. 74

WHAT IS SUFISM?

What is the spirit of the Sufi seeker in his search for the truth of Life? It is that of Love, of Harmony, of Wholeness. It brings God down from His heaven into the very centre of a person's life. As Emerson said when speaking about the poems of Hafiz "Love is a leveller and Allah becomes a groom and heaven a closet."

And if there is any sin it is "to limit the Holy One of Israel," a sin for which not only the Israelites were visited with vengeance, as we read in Psalm 78, but it is a sin for which all those who narrow down the circle of the being and becoming of God have been punished all through human history. Why? For, there is in man the spirit of non-conformity which in its positive aspect means the yearning for harmony with the All. It lies dormant for a long time because it is drugged with dogmas and doctrines, and with other similar opiates of vicarious visions and versions of truth. But there comes a moment when it is roused, when its titanic energy is released, when man challenges the whole world and invites on his head the displeasure of gods and men, when he says in the words of Rabindranath Tagore

"I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands. That is why it is so late and I have been guilty of such omissions.

'They come with their laws and their codes to bind me fast, but I evade them ever, for I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.

"People blame me and call me heedless, I doubt not they are right in their blame.

"The market day is over and work is all done for the busy. Those who come to call me in vain have gone.

conformity which before brought man out of his temple (or tomb?) of traditional faith on to the open road now brings him into the very arms of the Beloved

The term 'Sufism' in Islam, is usually derived from the Persian (*sawwof*), Greek *Sophos*, meaning 'wise' or from *soof*, meaning "wool," the reference being to the woollen garment which the first Sufis wore. Personally, however, I am inclined to attach more importance to the legend which says that the term is derived from *suffa* (as in the English word, 'sofa'), which means "bench," for, so the story goes, the beggars who in the days of the Prophet sat on a bench, placed outside the mosque at Mecca were called Sufis. For, may it not be that the people who sat on the bench outside the mosque sat there not with a view to asking for alms at the hands of the charitably inclined, but in silent protest against the sin of limiting the Limitless, God, within the four walls of a house of clay? Were it not so, the refrain of the song of the Sufis till this day would not have been, to quote a couplet from Sachal, a contemporary of Shah Latiff "We have seen the *Kaaba* in the heart, of what avail, then, is it to go to Mecca?"

Nor would have Bayazid of Bastami said, 'There is none other than God within my cloak,' or Mansur—the Prince of Sufis—given to the Sufis their current battle-cry, 'I am God.' Or as Abu Ali of Sindh said, "I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O Thou I' Verily, I am God, there is no God except me, glory to me. How great is my majesty!"

The Sufis say that Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, was the first Sufi, and this is not improbable because the germs of this religion of unity are in the *Koran* itself, and the earliest Sufis seem to have taken their stand on such texts as the following when they saw that their co-religionists had smothered God under the swaddling-clothes of sleek-faced, sectarian narrowness

"And to God belongeth the East and the West and whithersoever ye turn is the face of God" (ii-109)

"Thou didst not slay them (the enemies) but God slew them" (viii-17) and in (iv-80) "All is from God"

"Let the heart of the Sufi," says *Tarḥīman-al-Ashwāq*, "be wholly filled by the sublime conceptions of all embracing unity and all conquering love which form the real basis whereon the rest is built"

How is this unity of Divinity to be realized? Through Love which alone makes one's life's relationships lucid and luminous. Says Julal-ud-dīn, the author of *Masnaw-i-Manāwī*

"The more a man loves, the deeper he penetrates the divine purposes. Love is the astrolabe of heavenly mysteries, the eye-salve which clears the spiritual eye and makes it clairvoyant"

And love, says the Sufi, can be evoked from the heart of man only by the appeal of Beauty. That is why to the true Sufi, the rags of pseudo-poverty are what a red rag is to the bull, the ochre coloured robe is the mockery of beauty, and the unkempt appearance and the mien of mendicancy as if the besmearing of the Divine Face, which shines everywhere. Indeed, the greatest contribution of Sufism to the religious thought of the world is its conception of the Creator and His creation in terms of beauty. The nucleus of this conception may have been detected by the earliest Sufis in the following text in the *Koran*

"I was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, so I created creation in order that I might be known"

There is also a beautiful passage in *Yusuf-u-Zulaikha* of Jamī —

"Wherever Beauty dwells

Such is its nature and its heritage

From Everlasting Beauty, which emerged

From realms of purity to shine upon

The worlds, and all the souls which dwell there

Each speck of matter did He constitute

A mirror causing each one to reflect

The Beauty of His visage From the rose

Flashed forth His Beauty and the nightingale
 Beholding it, loved madly From that Fire
 The candle drew the lustre which beguiles
 The moth to immolation "

And for taking his lessons in Love man need not go to a forest and seek a teacher there As a Persian song says "In the school of Love the ABC or the first and the greatest lesson is to be out of one self Go, and tell the pilgrims on the path of Love that on this path to take the first step is to reach the goal"

This brings us on to two other standpoints of the Sufis, first, deliverance is not to be sought by fleeing from the world, for is not creation of God beautiful and is it not true, to quote the *Koran* again, that "there is nothing which does not celebrate His praise?" (xvii-46) Secondly, the lessons of love may be learned here and now, in our human world and in the company of our family and friends Says Jamī in *Yusaf u-Zulaikha*, "Ere ABC are rightly apprehended, how canst thou con the pages of the *Koran*?"

That is why the Sufis call God Beloved, and consider this world as the pageant, panorama and playground of His Love

Some other corollaries follow from these standpoints of the Sufis, such as, their tolerance ("the genuine coin and not the spurious counterfeit") for everyone, no matter what 'station' in life he might be occupying and their belief in the uniqueness of the individual, in the majesty of man

To illustrate the essence and expansiveness of their tolerance, there is the story of Moses, a story which is very often quoted by the Sufis when they want to bring home to the orthodox the truth of tolerance It is said that one day Moses overheard a shepherd praying in this wise, 'O Lord, I will wash thy robes and comb thy hair,' and he took him to task for making of God, so to say, such a personal affair The shepherd was pained at this shock to his simplicity of faith in, and intimacy

of affection for and association with, God to such an extent that thereafter he ceased to pray. Then Moses heard a voice from heaven telling him that he had done grievous wrong to God's beloved shepherd, and added, "Words are nothing to me. I regard the heart." Truly, it is the heart that matters, for once the heart is touched the whole landscape of life is illuminated and integrated. As Murad Ali, a Sufi, of Sindh, sings "It is through Love that I have attained, it has illuminated my life within the twinkling of an eye."

Or as Emerson said in the last century "That touch creates us, then we begin to be, thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of Eternity."

As regards the other standpoint, *viz*, the uniqueness of the individual, the Sufis say that each one "beats out" a path of his own to the Deity. Say they, "The ways unto God are as the number of the breaths of the sons of Man." Or as one of the Sindh Sufis told me when I implored him to show me the path, "What path shall I show you? There is no one path, there are as many as 320 million paths to reach His feet." Or as another Sufi once said

"Have you ever travelled by a tram? If you have, then you know that each passenger carries a ticket, which is non-transferable. No one can travel on another's ticket. Such is the journey of the seeker after Truth." Or as yet another Sufi said "Who showed the path to Majnun? Who showed the path to Leila? Love, then, follow Love."

Such being the views the Sufis hold, it is not surprising that the unitive and the love-illuminated Sufis (there are also the ethical and hide-bound Sufis, who hold different views. I shall come to them presently) refuse to take on any one as their disciple. They say that Silence is the only true teacher, hence, the great value, which they attach to silence in the spiritual life. They believe, in the words of Darya Khan, a Sufi of Sindh "Out of the silence comes the voice."

They say, in the strain of Lao-tzo,
 "All things in Nature work silently
 Goodness strives not

Follow diligently the way in your own heart,
 but make no display of it to the world "

Their attitude in the matter of teaching by word of mouth or through a set of spiritual exercises is akin to that of the *Rishi* about whom we read in the Upanishads that one day when a seeker went up to him and said to him, "Teach me, *Brahman*," he remained silent and even when the request was repeated thrice he did not say anything, but eventually he replied, "I do teach thee *Brahman*, but thou understandest it not This *Atman* is silent " In short, the Sufis teach, to use a very significant phrase of an English Bishop, by "unconscious tuition " They seem to believe that the Great Silence is not a vacuity, it is full of harmonies and hues, of visions and whispers, that the sky is full of invitations issued by God, and these invitations are being wafted by the wind and that when the individual receives his invitation, his soul is awakened from her sleep of self-sufficiency and she sets out on her journey to the home of the Beloved, whom she had forgotten while staying in the City of the Senses

What are the factors which contribute to the cultivation of this silence? First and foremost, solitude, for it is when we are alone in the open that the passions are set at rest, when Nature says to hustling and bustling, argumentative and aggressive individual, "So hot, little Sir?" The Sufis call solitude the ante-chamber to the Palace of the Beloved, the palace, built not of brick and mortar, but of the beams of the Moon of Beauty That is why they have their silence under the starry sky, when, to use a phrase of Walt Whitman, the very night air is "mystical "

The second factor which contributes to the cultivation of the Silence is Pain It lifts the veil off the face of the Beloved It throws open the unsuspected and

closed windows in His mansion. As Browning says
 "Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go"
 Be our joys three parts pain"

Reproofs and rebukes, sufferings and sorrows are all welcome because they prevent the Truth from being "stepped down," from being made up into a rod. For Truth is a road and not a rod, even if it be Aaron's rod. That is why the Sindh Sufis say "The Pain of Longing is our comrade on the path. May we be never united with the Beloved!"

There is the story of a German philosopher who was once asked by God to choose between having Absolute Truth and endless endeavour in search of Truth. He replied, "Lord, absolute Truth is for Thee, man can have or attain only to relative truth. Let me, therefore, have the boon of endless endeavour in search of truth."

Verily, Pain is the enemy of that self-complacency and self-sufficiency which is the spiritual death of a seeker.

The third factor is fellowship with all aspects and expressions of life. There is nothing evil as such, for everything being a creation of the Beautiful, nothing can ever be ugly. And what we call evil is, according to the Sufis, the condition precedent to the manifestation of His Light and Love, inasmuch as manifestation is made possible by placing the antithesis in juxtaposition, for instance, Light is known by the non-Light being, so to speak, bracketed with it. Verily, the beauty of the Beloved is seen in the dark. It is man that is at fault in the matter, it is he whose eye has not been cleared of the dust of duality.

"Love is the fulfilment of all laws," said the Master, and so the Sufi has no laws, as such, to regulate his search. "Love is the king," sing the Sufis. And Love is no sergeant-at arms!

The ethical or the ascetic Sufi has, however, reduced these fundamental standpoints of the Sufis to so many formulae, or stations, as they call them. They envisage

the search after truth as a journey which is marked by stages, while the unitive Sufi holds that the realization of truth is a pathless reality like the trackless path of the birds of the air. These stages are called *shariat*, *tari-khat*, *marfat* and *hakikat*. In the first stage, the seeker lives within the boundaries marked out for him by the scriptures, his ideal is the *Kazi*. In the second stage, he is shaken out of his self-complacency by having his intelligence quickened through the repetition of a certain *mantram* or sacred word. When the intelligence has become keener, the seeker is thrown into the maelstrom of doubt, that is the third stage. Eventually when doubt has razed his castle of cards to the ground, and the truth of oneness has dawned upon him, he finds his centre, which is also the centre of the universe. Sings the Persian poet

‘Thou thinkest thou art but a small thing,
Whereas in thee is involved the whole universe”

They lay stress on the purification of the self, which consists of *nafs* (the appetitive soul), *ruh* (the spirit), *qalb* (the heart) and *aql* (the intelligence)), for they say that unless this is done the little self will persist in accompanying the aspirant or the lover when he goes to the tryst to meet the Beloved.

He is my own little self, my Lord, he knows
no shame, but I am ashamed to come to thy door
in his company”

Thus, we have two kinds of Sufis, the unitive kind and the ethical kind. The former are like flowers in the vase or vessel, placed on the altar,—rather they are like flowers growing in the open in sunshine and in shower, while the latter are like the vessel on the altar, which must be scrubbed and scoured everyday in order to make it clean and bright. There is, however, the third kind which is the golden mean between the two. They follow a discipline of their own. The neophyte is asked in the earlier stages of his spiritual apprenticeship to serve his fellow-creatures for a certain number of years

This helps him to keep his little self in its proper place, for as he serves he has to keep before him the ideal, 'Thou, my brother, not I'. This reminds one of Leigh Hunt's poem, "Abou-ben Adham and the Angel" in which we are told at first Abou's name was not among the names of those who love the Lord. It was, however, at the head of the names of the people who love their fellow creatures. Could it be that Abou was in this probationary stage? Later on he has to serve God by watching over his heart, for which purpose he has to retire into himself. When ultimately he has found what may be called the rhythm of life, he once more enters on an active life. Nowadays the two stages of service and self-collectedness are combined. The aspirant has during the day to engage himself in some activity of a beneficent kind, while at night he must commune with himself. The unitive Sufi is one who lives in the world and yet is not of the world. To him silence and work are the obverse and reverse of the selfsame coin. The ethical Sufi, however, hovers between law and love till he finds the fulfilment of all laws in the expansive affectionateness of his heart.

A certain Sufi followed to the very letter all the diverse injunctions of his faith, Islam, and yet a vision of God was not vouchsafed to him. He appealed to God against this apparent injustice of His. God replied, "If you want to see me, go to the house where there are song and dance." The Sufi was astonished at this, for had he not read in the *Koran* that such things are taboo? However, he made up his mind to visit the house of a person who was fond of music. As he listened to the songs, which were being sung, he had a vision of God vouchsafed to him, and he heard God saying to him, 'Taboos make of Me a tyrant,—of Me, who am thy lover.'

The unitive Sufi sets no store by ecstasy and miracles. He says, 'Miracles hinder the elect from penetrating the inner shrine of Truth.' He believes

in the illuminative capacity of love, which is both all-inclusive and selfless. Says Mahmud of Sabīster, 'To him whose soul is illuminated, all the universe is the Book of God Most High.' It is the ethical Sufi who is impatient to attain to a state of ecstasy, for he feels that that is the height of spirituality!

The unitive Sufi is often a poet, while the ascetic or ethically minded Sufi is a philosopher. Both attain, in the end, to the same goal—namely, of realization of the One in the Many, but through different avenues of approach, which may be illustrated by an anecdote. It is said once two great Sufis, Ibn Sina and Abu Saïd, met each other and were engaged in a long conversation. After they had parted they were asked by their respective disciples to give their estimates of each other. Said Ibn Sina, "What I know, he sees," and Abu Saïd observed, "What I see, he knows."

Whatever be the avenues of approach, one fact cannot be controverted that the little or lower self is kept in the shade, once a man has realized the truth of unity. He has passed from the stage, 'It is I' to "It is Thou." And yet his self has not been annihilated, it has merely lost its edge of isolation and aggressiveness. In the words of Shāh Latīf, the *ghaym* has become *ayn*, or to use the English alphabets, the small *i* has lost its dot, and become capital "I." The seeker has passed on from *fana* to *baqa*, from absorption by self to absorption into Self. He has died unto himself so that he might live, for he knows that the eternal—He can never die. Says Rumi in a passage of exquisite beauty—

"I died from the mineral and became a plant,
I died from the plant and re-appeared in an
animal,
I died from the animal and became a man,
Wherefore then should I fear?
When did I grow less by dying?
Next time I shall die from the man
That I may grow the wings of the angel

SUFISM IN SINDH

When the Life-force first set out on the path of outgoing, the motive which impelled it onward was the deep-seated desire in its heart to evolve and expand itself into the many. But when Man appeared on the scene, he cried halt to this meandering multiplicity, for he feared lest he might be lost in the maze of things. The Life-force, however, careered on unmindful of the entreaty of Man. Then he threw a challenge to it and said, "If yours is the path of outgoing, mine is that of return; if you find your fulfilment in the Many, I shall fulfil myself through the realization of the One." And ever since, these two parallel processes: of outgoing and of return, have been at work in the shaping of human history.

For, what is the spirit of human history? It is to weld the Many into the One, to make "brother of the stranger". And to this end, it has adumbrated three principal laws: the Law of Communication, the Law of Communion and the Law of Consciousness. Man's first contact with things as with his fellow-men, is that of conquest; this is followed by that of communion when he tries to know them; and the third and resultant contact is that of consciousness when after having established a relationship with his environment he begins to know himself. These three channels of communication answer to the inherent needs of the trinity of the make-up of man, who has body, mind and spirit. In short, there are three avenues of approach to the Temple of Life: of contact, of cognition and of comradeship.

The history of India, too, has been influenced, nay, integrated by the operation of these three laws, and so also that of Sindh, otherwise there is no meaning in the many invasions made by foreign conquerors. The

Greek, the Scythian, the Arab and the Persian came to India evidently for the purposes of opening up communications between the West and the East, for had not God spoken to the Spirit of Man in the whispers of the star-studded sky that to Him belong both the East and the West? First, therefore, came the cavalry, and when the dust of the road, kicked up by its hurricane march, had settled down and the blood-stained earth had been carpeted with green grass, the people of Sindh heard the tinkling bells of the camels of the caravan. The soldier was succeeded by the trader. We learn from old historical records that the Romans purchased a certain kind of cosmetic from Sindh, the Greek books tell us that the Sindhus had a common mess, Ptolemy says that there was a place in Malaya Archipelago called Sindoe, which was perhaps, colonised by them, Sindh exported silk, indigo, and gems to Arabia and Java, she manufactured tiles, each of which had a peculiar ring, pottery which was the admiration of the whole world and carpets which matched well with those of Persia. The province was so prosperous that it could pay in the sixth century B.C., an annual tribute of about a hundred-and-fifty thousand pounds to the Persian King, Darius. When the sound of the tinkling bells of the camels of the caravan had died, the people heard the "still small voice", for God comes to the heart of man without a bell, candle or book. They did not, however, understand it fully, hence, the never-ending chain of interpreters and annotators who were sent to them from time to time. The witnesses to this awakening of man's consciousness exist till this day. The ruins of old Jain temples in Bhupah and Bulri, Uderlal and Varwah, of Buddhist stupas and monasteries in Mirpurkhas, of the images of Shiva in Sehwan (orig "Shiv-sthan") and the presence of the mosque and the church,—all testify to the impact of the various visions of the Reality. Sindh has been, down the ages, a miniature guest-house of cultures, an abridged edition of the history of India. Perhaps, she has been destined by

providence for this purpose, else Sufism would not have found a fertile soil in the province. And although Sir Charles Napier after his conquest of Sindh cabled to London, "I have sinned," (and thereby hangs a sad tale!) the Maker of History,—history, which, in a sense, is His story, a story of God's own life,—carried out His own purposes and plans.

The reactions of the people to these contacts have resulted in Sindh's acquiring a spirit of adaptability, elasticity and eclecticism,—a hospitality of mind which is at once magnanimous and many-sided, a spirit of freedom to adjust herself to the new vistas and visions of Truth, a spirit which says, 'Conformity is the hobgoblin of small minds,' or, *amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica*, (i.e., Plato is dear to me, Socrates is dear to me, but Truth is dearer still). Hence, the cry of the desert-dweller,—a cry which is heard in his *Kafis*, "O, where art Thou?"

And when the hour struck, the first band of Sufis came to Sindh. The story goes that about the year 1350 A.D., one Usman Shah, a courtier of the king of Baghdad, was seized one day all of a sudden with a desire to come to India. There was nothing in the circumstances of his life to account for this new-born impulse in his heart, for he was prosperous in every way. But "the Spirit bloweth where it listeth." It can, however, be explained on certain other grounds. Throughout our history we find that there has been at work, what the Germans call, *Drang nach Osten* (i.e., impulse towards the East). The invaders turned their feet towards the East, the caravans of culture turned their faces towards the East, because they believed *ex Oriente Lux* i.e., light comes from the East. Why? Who can tell? May it not be that India has been intended from the very dawn of history to be the cradle of civilization, the open arena for the adventure of Truth? Has God kept in her hands the secret of Life, the magic-word, "sesame", which flings open all the doors in the mansion of the Father?

The sun rises in the East, so does the sun of Truth, which is enshrined in the magic words *shantam*, *shivam*, *advaitam*. Does not the sun symbolise this truth? Does he not rise in the silence of the dawn and enter our human world with the self-effacement of the new bridegroom? Does he not illumine the inter-relationships of things, and thus unite them in himself, —the Many in the One? Well, to resume the story, Usman Shah heard the call from India and tendered his resignation to the king. The king dissuaded him from what he probably considered to be a will-o-the-wisp, but Usman Shah remained firm in his decision. He had three friends, Sheikh Bahawal-din, Farid Ganj and Makhdum Jalal-ud-din, whom he persuaded to accompany him to the Land of Light. They responded, for in them, too, the Spirit had been working out her own purposes. The day of departure was fixed, the four friends came to the harbour without the burden of any personal belongings, for they had mutually pledged to one another that they would not take any belongings with them. When they were in the midst of the Arabian Sea their boat began to sink. Usman Shah asked his companions to pray to Providence, and as they prayed, he felt that one of them was secretly carrying some symbol of worldly wealth. So he queried his comrades. At first they replied that they were not carrying anything with them, but eventually one of them confessed that he had hidden a brick of gold in his armpit as a provision against the rainy day. Usman Shah took the brick from his friend and threw it into the sea. And, lo! the boat began once more to sail smoothly. Verily, Truth must have the aspirant's all, she cannot compromise with reservations, that is, why prudence, in the sense in which the word is used by the worldly wise, is for the man of Spirit the arithmetic of fools. The prudent man believes in the figure 1, which, according to him, endows the zero with value, while the man of faith believes that it is zero which endows 1 with value! For He, the

man of faith says *astra castra, numen lumen* (i.e., the stars are my camp and God is my lamp) At last the four friends reached Sindh They came to Sehwan, which was full of "book-bound" priests When the Moslem priests heard of the arrival of the newcomers and suspecting that they were perhaps *sayads*, their potential rivals, they sent them a vessel, filled to overflowing with milk, implying that the city was already overfull with priests Usman Shah returned the milk-pot with a petal of a flower placed on its top, to signify that he and his friends would only float on the stream of life and not shut themselves up like them into stagnant pools of sects and priestcraft And so the four friends settled down for some time in Sehwan But the Spirit of Truth must perforce broadcast her message, so after a few months' stay, she sent Bahawalddin to Uch (near Multan, in the Punjab) and the other two to two different places They were followed by Khwaja Hassan Nizami from Baghdad who went to Delhi and settled down there

What did these Sufis teach? They taught the eternal and the one lesson ever taught in the School of the Spirit, viz., be disciples of Truth and not of the disciples of Truth, or to use the Sufi phraseology, at the tryst of Truth let only the lover and the Beloved, Leila and Majnun, meet and none else play the part of the go-between

Where is this tryst of Truth? In the heart, which the Sufis call the "Palace of the Beloved",—the scriptures being, so to speak, the office-rooms of the Beloved, the Secretariat of the Governor of the Universe!

Now, this standpoint runs counter to that of the sectarian who believes that Truth dwells in the head and that the sacred books are the Dark Chambers of the King To speak without a figure, the Sufis taught the people to be non-conformists Says Shah Latif "Keep a contrary eye, move contrary to the masses, if

the world moves down the stream, you move up the stream ”

At another place he says “Men fight shy of vice
My Beloved turned his face from me because of virtue!”

The people were taught to be radicals of the deepest dye, to be heretics. Sings Sachal

“The way of heresy the *Murshid* (teacher) himself taught me. So long as these mosques, these so-called holy places, these raised towers do not crumble to dust, so long the path of the Spirit cannot be seen clear ”

Says he in another place, “Through virtue and vice, none knew God ”

Do not we hear the same strain in *Gitanjali*?

“Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him ”

Sings Bedil, another Sufi of Sindh. “The lover is sick of religion ”

Why does the Sufi disapprove of this, so to speak, dissection of the Truth of Life, of this forgetting of the flower in the counting and colour of the petals? Because he says, to quote *Gitanjali* again

“Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile and whisper among themselves

“Vain is this seeking! Unbroken perfection is over all.”

Or as Shah Latif says in a beautiful passage

“He himself is the splendour of the splendid,

He himself is the soul of beauty,

He himself is the form of the Beloved,

He himself is teacher,

He himself is pupil,

He is thought himself,

—All this is known within the soul

He himself sees Himself,

He Himself loves Himself,

He Himself creates abundantly,

He Himself longs for His created,
 He is this, He is that,
 He is the lord of death, He is the lord of life.
 He is foe,
 He is friend,
 He is here, He is there,
 He lives in the mind,
 He himself sees the light of Himself."

But how is this affirmation of the One to be realized? Through what Sachal calls, "the Mystery of negation-affirmation," or what according to Shah Latiff is "Being-non-being." Or as Bedil sings in a song, "There is no need to study or teach books; learn only the secret of self-effacement."

It is said that one day in the evening of his life, a great scholar of Afghanistan who lived several centuries ago called all his disciples and took them to the bank of a river. Then he asked them to fetch from his house the many books which he had written during his lifetime. The disciples obeyed. And when the books were brought, the teacher threw them into the water and said, "There goes the intoxicating egotism of the intellect. Now, I shall be able to recognise the Reality."

This self-effacement is born of desirelessness. For, what can the aspirant desire, when once he has postulated that the Beloved is his Friend, and that nothing ugly or untoward can ever be His gift to his lover? Says Shah Latif:

"Art thou a Sufi? Then keep no desire,
 Give up thine head and throw it into fire."

It is the head which behaves like the banker's interest-calculator!

Sings he in another place,

"The road of the Spirit is clear as day,
 only desires have hidden it."

Do not we seem to hear this strain also in the song of the Sufi of Santiniketan:

"Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp

it touches with its breath It is unholy, take not thy gifts through its unclean hands Accept only what is offered by sacred love"

According to Shah, therefore, a Sufi is one who makes the Beloved his all-in-all

There are three stages in achieving this self-effacement Incidentally, I may just mention that the Sindh Sufi believes that it is absolutely necessary for the aspirant to have a *murshid*, a teacher But it must be the true teacher, and they add that at no time of human history the world has been without such teachers According to them the number of such teachers is forty, which number is always maintained, and it is they who carry on the Inner Government of the World The first stage which may be called the stage of affirmation is when the individual says, "I am",—I am this, that and the other thing That is, when he is always identifying himself with the species (*sefat*) Shah Latiff calls this the stage of *kasrat* (*variety*), for the seer is lost in the maze of the many, what the Sufis call *tilsam* The second stage is reached when he says, "I am not",—I am not what I see, I am not the body, the mind and the emotion, when he is given the *ism-e-azim* (the Great Word) like *Om*, *Hoo* or *Vahyadaoo* to meditate upon This is perhaps the stage which has been described by Thomas a Kempis in the words "The naked disciple alone can see the naked Jesus" and by Shah Latif in the words, 'Come out, ye all, and stand bereft of everything before the Beloved', the stage which the Greek philosopher Plotinus calls 'the flight of the alone' In this stage the aspirant learns to look for the genus (*zat*) in the species (*sefat*) or as Shah Latif would say, for the *vahdat* (unity) in the *kasrat* (variety) Sachal has described these two stages in a song

"Beloved, the colourless came into myriad colours
The drops, the waves, the streams, all these forms
conceal the real water One is the seed, thousands are
the green leaves, myriads the fruits and branches

Originally there is clay, but the potter's pots carry numerous names. Originally there is the sugar-cane, many sweets are but its many forms. Gold is one, ornaments are but its forms."

But Dalpat goes one step further:

"O Dalpat! you could call it one if there were any two, when there is no two, the word one cannot be used."

The third stage is when the aspirant exclaims "I am",—I am all, when he sees that the text, "I am", is writ large on the face of the universe; in the song of the morning bird, as in the whisper of the tree at midnight, in the heaven-encircling sun as in the pearly dew-drop on the petals of the sun-flower; in the cry of the new-born babe, as in the symphony of the Shining Ones; in the resounding and rushing rapids of the Niagara Falls, as in the tiny shy blade of grass, in the silent heart of God, as in the eloquence of the poet whose lips have been touched with fire, and in the shadow of the inner rapture on the radiant face of the seer. It is when the aspirant has attained to this stage that he exclaims in the words of Elizabeth Browning:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God,

But only he who sees takes off his shoes."

One can only feel the mystery of the "I AM", for, who dare describe it? Says Sami!

"The dumb enjoys the sweets, can he speak?"

Or as the Book says:

"Those to whom is revealed the knowledge of God, they are made dumb."

Now, what has happened between the first "I AM" and the final "I AM"? The same thing has happened in the case of the mad man who wandered from morning to evening in search of the Philosopher's Stone, which transmutes baser metal into gold. The story goes that there was a mad man who was once seized with the stinging desire of acquiring the alchemist's stone. So one day he set out on his search. He wore a belt of

copper and whenever he saw any stone he would pick it up and rub it against the belt in the hope that the latter might shine forth as golden. Days and weeks, months and years passed in this way but without any seeming success. Then one day when he woke up from his sleep, he saw that in one corner the belt had become golden. But what particular stone had done the miracle, he could not say. And yet it was no one stone, but the cumulative result of the rubbing of all the stones that had brought about the consummation, which had been devoutly wished for by the mad man.

The seeker when he is under the sway of his self says, 'God is nowhere', but when he has become one with Truth, he says, "God is now here". The phenomenal world remains as before, it is his eye which has been 'winged' with the vision of the One. In the first stage, to use Æs phrase, "the Majesty" had been "outlawed and outcast," the individual depending on himself as the very centre of the world, but in the final stage he 'leans as a friend' on this very Majesty.

The mystery of the "I am" is like the interminable series of the skinny coats of the onion. Every time when one attains to a new vision or understanding of himself he says, "I have found myself", and then there is sprung on him by the Divine Wizard another aspect of himself and the seeker has again to set out on the voyage of Self discovery. Sings the Sufi of Santiniketan

'But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart, and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonder.'

Verily, what lover,—if he be of the true type,—could ever catalogue all the attributes of his beloved, for is not a lover one who, to use common parlance but with a different interpretation, makes mountain of a mole-hill,—the hill being the face of the beloved which has no end of visible and invisible moles of beauty,—for

only one of which the Poet of Persia was willing to exchange the wealth of Samarkand and Bukhara? He is, indeed, a raw lover who could ever expect to write a "full-length" biography of his beloved. The song is not merely the text, nor is the song everything. It is the singing which is all, that is why the stars sing every night of

"The ancient ample moment, the divine,
The God-foot within man
For this, for this the lights innumerable
As symbols shine that we the true light win
For every star and every deep they fill
Are stars and deeps within"

—Æ in "Star Teachers"

SHAH LATIF

‘What is your age?’ They asked him when the hair of his head had turned silvery and that of his beard snow-white. He smiled. Then one of them, who could not check his curiosity, remarked, “Three score and ten years?” He remained silent. His inquirers grew impatient and angrily exclaimed, ‘Why do you not tell us?’ He replied, “I am only nine months old.” “What?” They rejoined, red with resentment, “that is a lie.” ‘I speak the truth’, answered the mystic, “for I reckon my age from the moment I saw the light of His face and not when I first announced with a cry my arrival into this world.”

Such being their concept of chronology, it is not difficult to understand the reticence of the mystics regarding the events of their earthly life, and their impatience, if not annoyance, with the chronicler. They would seem to say to him, “Why loiter in the paths and bye-paths of the past? We ourselves always strove to live in the eternal and ever-new present, the contours and colours of which are to be found in our story and song. Why not be our fellow-traveller? Why, instead, walk behind us and measure our footprints on the sands of time?” That is the reason, why the mystics, though often unchronicled, are not, however, unsung.

In the life of Shah Latif, the greatest mystic-poet of Sindh, I shall, however, refer to certain outstanding events and incidents so that in them we may see the tone and trend of the unconscious unfoldment of his impulse and endeavour towards the attainment of the Reality. Though we have no Time-machine like that of Mr H. G. Wells’ imagination to enable us to range up and down the centuries and locate each and every event in terms of time, and although the track trodden by the

mystics is as visible to the naked eye as the watery route along which the ocean-going liners travel, yet in the external aspects of their life the Spirit can discover an outline and an image of the path they pursued.

It is said that when Shah Latif was yet a child, of barely four summers (1693 A.D.), he was sent to a priest-cum-pedagogue to learn the Arabic alphabets. On the very first day when the teacher taught him, a strange thing happened. "Say *Aliph*", said the preceptor to the pupil.

"*Aliph*", repeated the pupil.

"Say *Be*"

The pupil refused to repeat the second alphabet.

"Say *Be*", said the teacher in accents of anger, but met with the same fate. He, however, spared the rod,—and thanks to the good offices of the compassionate cherub, who shapes in silence man's ends and aims, ideals and aspirations,—the child, too, was spared. The incident was reported to the father, who fortunately happened to be endowed with the rare gift of understanding. "The child is right," said the father and with that reply he silenced the teacher for ever and brought Shah out of the prison, euphemistically called 'school'. This story may or may not be true, but all the same it embodies and illustrates the central concept in the mystic's life. As he says:

"Let there be in your heart
The play of *Aliph* (Allah),
And thou wilt know
The vanity of book-learning.
If thou wilt learn
To look on life with the pure eye,
Thou wilt know
That the Name of Allah is enough.
They who have longing in their hearts,
They read only the page
Wherein they see the Beloved."

The boy, however, attended daily another school,—the School of Nature, where he learnt the language of Life from the ‘play of this *Aliph*,’—Allah In his own words

“With your face sandwiched between your knees, live in solitude’

There everything spoke to him of God, being a witness to the Truth that in *diffused diversity* there dwells the One, who is without a second

“Wherever I turn my eyes, it is Him that I see”

“Everything proclaims Him Every one has become a *Mansur* How many of them shall I guillotine or place on the gallows?”

His home, too, was fragrant with the earnestness and intensity of spiritual aspiration and endeavour, and it is also there that he learnt Arabic and Persian from his father

When he grew older his father desired that he should follow in his footsteps and carry on the tradition of the family as preceptors “by special appointment” to the members of the ruling dynasty Shah Latif consented more out of courtesy and considerateness for the aged father than out of allegiance to the truth, which he had sensed within himself now and again, but which had not as yet been integrated into his life To him, the lover of the Beautiful, the highest form of worship was to feed oneself on the beauty of the face of the Beloved

‘Fasts and prayers’—well

They have their value,
But there be yet another Light,
Whereby to see the Beloved,
It is the Light of Love”

And yet he must, to please the *paterfamilias*, say the prescribed prayers and tell the beads of the rosary He continued these practices for some years when one day he was shaken out of the slough of conformity by the conversation between two milk-maids, which he overheard, and by the behaviour of the goats which had

come to the bank of a stream to quench their thirst. One milkmaid said to the other, "I have met my lover so many times; how many times have you?" The other answered, "Sister, why keep an account of one's meeting with one's lover?" Thereupon Shah threw away his rosary, saying: "Indeed, why keep an account with our lover?" And he burst forth into a song:

"Body their rosary,
Mind their beads,
Their heart is the harp,
The threads of longing singing in utter unity.
The One, the only One, is the song within.
They whose sleep is prayer wake even in sleep."

Again, one day when he was sitting by the roadside he saw some travellers bound for Mecca and felt inclined to join them. Presently he noticed that a herd of thirsty goats after slaking their thirst in a stream of clear, crystal water, went away without even casting a gracious glance at the source of their satisfaction, and Shah exclaimed:

"May I seek and ever seek,
But may I never meet."

The seeker of truth, it is true, always refuses, so to speak, to be bound down for peace,—peace, which is death; he must ever be actuated by the spirit of divine discontent, by the incentive of anticipation rather than of realization. He is ever on the wing like the lark which sings at the gate of heaven only because it soars. In short, to use a significant phrase of the Sufi of Santiniketan,—an aspirant ought always to be like "the Bedouin of the Desert," with his feet ever in the stirrups. For, is not travelling more brimful of the ecstasy of adventure than the joy of reaching the destination?

Now, Love alone can renew every day the vision and the worship of the Beautiful. And so when Shah was still in the heyday of his youth there was vouchsafed to him an experience, which left an indelible impression on his life. The daughter of the ruling family fell ill; the father sent for the senior preceptor—the father of

ries as centres of esoteric and occult training Describing the Master, Shah says —

"The *yogi* came out from inside the abode of
ecstasy,

The Master effulgent with the glory of the
full moon

His fragrance suffused the earth,

The face of the Master is as the sun at dawn,

The turban on his head flashed as lightning on the
clouds,

He showed me the abode where the Exquisite One
received illumination "

It must have been at the time of his initiation or realization that he uttered

'Thanks to the Beloved that I have met Him face
to face'

Perhaps, the 'word of power' he received was "Om," for, he says in one place "If the *guru* were to give thee the one curved word it would be to thee as light in darkness, therefore, keep *meem* in thy mind and place *Aliph* before it

"When walks my Beloved, the Lord of Grace,
Earth cries *Bismillah*, 'Glory to the Lord'

It kisses the track He makes

Hours stand enraptured, utterly amazed,

By the Lord, the beauty of the Beloved is
matchless "

One day in the hills, he heard the cry of some one in anguish He tracked the cry to its source, a cave in which a semi-conscious man was singing one of his own verses (i.e., Shah's), which he had heard sometime before from the lips of one of the wandering minstrels and which had led to his renouncing the world The line was, "I shall now go all alone to the Beloved" Shah was surprised at this The camel-man wanted Shah--whom he did not recognise,—to recite to him, if he knew them, the remaining verses His wishes were complied with, and Shah sang

"There are high mountain passes and precipices,
sharp as the spear on the path

"But my sufferings and my yearning shall ever be
my faithful companions on the journey in search of my
Beloved "

No sooner did the camel-man hear these verses than
he swooned and breathed his last. Shah consigned the
dead body to the grave and, to this day, whenever any
camel-man passes by this grave he stops for a moment
to salute in silence the spirit of search for Truth,
symbolised by the camel-man. And Shah used to say
regarding this lover, "I never yet saw a man as true and
with such a burnt-up heart as this camel-man "

After having wandered in the worlds of Nature and
of Man, the mystic-poet returned home, having realized
the Beloved in his own heart

"Look within, and see He is there "

"The Beloved was born within the heart "

He had by now lost the aggressiveness of individualism and found the rhythm of life. He had been
acquitted of the "heresy of separateness" To him,
everything proclaimed God and His glory. He recognised
his kinship with heaven as well as with his own home

"Thou art the sky and the nest as well "

—*Gitanjali*

At last the parents of the girl understood the depth
and dignity of his love for her and so they gave her hand
to him in marriage. Thereafter they lived a dedicated life
of service and of song, their children being, as he once
said, the aspirants and the ascetics. He had drunk deep
of the cup of love divine and become free and fearless.
He could now never lose his way in the maze of the
Many

"Having drunk the wine of love, I now know the
Beloved in all His amplitude

The fire of (longing) love burns constantly in my
heart, day and night "

"Thou art that, Thou art that "

He has become one with the Beloved, and all the knots in his life have been loosened and cut open. He has attained to cosmic love, cosmic sympathy and cosmic understanding. He has built bridges between himself and his many-aspected environs and many-faceted personality. He has become a relative of the whole world.

"When one knows thee, then alien there is none,
then no door is shut " —Gitanjali

The riddle has been read, and the mystery resolved. How do these things come to pass? Who can tell? That they do in God's own good time and through His grace is but too true. But only when the right hour is struck. As Emerson says in his essay on "Spiritual Life"

"God screens us evermore from premature ideas. Our eyes are holden that we cannot see things that stare us in the face, until the hour arrives, when the mind is ripened,—then we behold them, and the time when we saw them not is like a dream."

In this screening one sees the mercy of God, not His partiality because He reveals Himself to the elect, nor His parsimony in not sharing His wisdom with all at once.

For, who but the brave could ever withstand the terrible meekness of the Master of the World and the dazzling light of the face of the Eternal Lover of us all?

But the mystic Shah Latif was also a poet. His songs, as also his stories, are in Sindhi, which language is derived from the Sanskrit stock, though as the province had been under the Moslem rulers for centuries, it has been Persianised considerably in vocabulary and influenced not a little in its construction. It is said that Shah Latif whenever he was in a state of ecstasy would burst forth into song, and one of the fellow-seekers sitting by, would take these down. The Poet was not aware of this transcription. But one day shortly before his death, the amanuensis brought out his collection and showed it to him. He straightway threw it into the water. The disciples began to weep and piteously appealed to him

to let them have a record of his songs. He agreed and asked his favourite disciple, who knew most of his songs by heart, to begin singing and as she sang, an amanuensis transcribed them. And the record was then shown to the Poet, who approving of the same, said "This is my *nuskha*" (i.e., "prescription for the malady of life of a physician," but it may also mean 'Word,' the root being the Persian *Sukhan*) His song, as that of each true poet, including that of the Poet of all Poets, is the "Word made flesh."

In his songs he sings of human love, of Divine Love, to which human love is a stepping-stone, of the beauty of Nature, of the beauty of the Beloved, who is now addressed as a Physician, who cures one with His pinch of grace, now as a Tavern-Keeper who gives the cup only when one's head is offered as a price, and again as a Friend, of the pilgrimage of pain, and also occasionally he enshrines in them experiences of his other states of consciousness to which the man of the world is often a stranger. And the singing thereof constitutes their excellence. Were it not so, we would not have witnessed, ever since he passed away in 1752, to the wonderful phenomenon of his songs being sung in the fulness of their hearts not only by the several scores of people living in Bhit Shah every Thursday night till the small hours of the morning, but by thousands of people living in Sindh, who sing them daily. These songs, which are sung or chanted in various tunes such as *Kalyan*, *Yaman Kalyan*, *Khambat*, etc. are called by Shah wai, which is from the Sanskrit word, *varta*, meaning a "statement or news," though they are popularly known as *Kafi*, (which may

the feelings of his father and also to help the masses proceed on the path step by step he had often to expound the traditional tenets of Sufism

"Callest thou thyself a moth'

Then turn not back at the sight of fire,
Ask of the moth' what it is to burn
Fire has burnt many,
Burn thou this fire "

"Rejoice! rejoice!

Ecstasy is with the eyes,
There is no ecstasy without eyes
They have purchased joy
And carry it with themselves
This state is beyond words,
Even if these eyes at a villain look,
They see him as the Beloved "

"See not with these the eyes of flesh

The eyes never realized the Beloved by seeing
They who closed both the eyes, they saw Him.
Take care, Oh Brother!

These fleshly eyes will entangle thee some day
Give not, therefore, up the bird of reality "

"A needle to me is more than kingdoms worth,
It clothes all the naked of the world.
Itself alone it naked keeps "

"They who accept the Cross

As their wedding bed
To them is the vision of God
In Death "

"They only should bear the sacred mark
Who are faithful to their own heresy "

"Love is the teacher supreme, love is the be-all
and end all of existence "

"The birds, the beasts and the ants,
Mistake them not as another's voice,
By the Beloved, all this noise is His "

So far his songs are concerned, it has to be remembered that like one of the present-day poets of England,

to let them have a record of his songs. He agreed and asked his favourite disciple, who knew most of his songs by heart, to begin singing and as she sang, an amanuensis transcribed them. And the record was then shown to the Poet, who approving of the same, said "This is my *nuskha*" (i.e., "prescription for the malady of life of a physician," but it may also mean "Word," the root being the Persian *Sukhan*) His song, as that of each true poet, including that of the Poet of all Poets, is the "Word made flesh."

In his songs he sings of human love, of Divine Love, to which human love is a stepping-stone, of the beauty of Nature, of the beauty of the Beloved, who is now addressed as a Physician, who cures one with His pinch of grace, now as a Tavern-Keeper who gives the cup only when one's head is offered as a price, and again as a Friend, of the pilgrimage of pain, and also occasionally he enshrines in them experiences of his other states of consciousness to which the man of the world is often a stranger. And the singing thereof constitutes their excellence. Were it not so, we would not have witnessed, ever since he passed away in 1752, to the wonderful phenomenon of his songs being sung in the fulness of their hearts not only by the several scores of people living in Bhut Shah every Thursday night till the small hours of the morning, but by thousands of people living in Sindh, who sing them daily. These songs, which are sung or chanted in various tunes such as *Kalyan*, *Yaman Kalyan*, *Khambhat*, etc. are called by Shah *wai*, which is from the Sanskrit word, *varta*, meaning a "statement or news," though they are popularly known as *Kafi*, (which may be from the Persian *Kafia*, meaning "rhythm") Shah himself was a lover of music. He once said, "In my heart there is a tree of Divine Love, which dries up unless I sing or listen to music. I am restless without it, but with it I commune with the Creator." But all his songs are not lyrics, many of them are poems with a heavy dose of didacticism. The reason is obvious. Not to hurt

the feelings of his father and also to help the masses proceed on the path step by step he had often to expound the traditional tenets of Sufism

"Callest thou thyself a moth'

Then turn not back at the sight of fire,

Ask of the moth' what it is to burn

Fire has burnt many,

Burn thou this fire "

"Rejoice! rejoice!

Ecstasy is with the eyes,

There is no ecstasy without eyes

They have purchased joy

And carry it with themselves

This state is beyond words,

Even if these eyes at a villain look,

They see him as the Beloved "

"See not with these the eyes of flesh

The eyes never realized the Beloved by seeing

They who closed both the eyes, they saw Him.

Take care, Oh Brother!

These fleshly eyes will entangle thee some day

Give not, therefore, up the bird of reality "

"A needle to me is more than kingdoms worth,

It clothes all the naked of the world

Itself alone it naked keeps "

"They who accept the Cross

As their wedding-bed

To them is the vision of God

In Death "

"They only should bear the sacred mark

Who are faithful to their own heresy "

' Love is the teacher supreme, love is the be-all
and end-all of existence "

"The birds, the beasts and the ants,

Mistake them not as another's voice,

By the Beloved, all this noise is His "

So far his songs are concerned, it has to be remembered that like one of the present-day poets of England,

"his lyrical flame is not self-kindling, but needs the tinder of narrative" But the stories which he pressed into the service of his song were not his own creation They were current among the people, he only adorned and interpreted, nay, illuminated them in the telling Even to this day, every one knows the stories of Sasui and Punhu, Umar and Marui, Momui and Rano, Hir and Ranjhu, Suhni and Mehar and similar other stories There is a spiritual quality and also a selective process in his narrative, which makes it "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever" The story of Sunhi and Mehar, for instance, runs as follows

In a certain city there lived a potter, named Tula He had a daughter of peerless beauty, Suhni, whom Sachal describes in one place in these words "Others are born of their parents but she was born of Love" She was a devout student of the *Koran* One day a caravan of traders from Bokhara, headed by one Izat Beg, pitched their tent in the city where the potter dwelt He asked a servant to go to Tula and buy some earthen pots of exquisite workmanship The servant obeyed but when he returned to the camp he brought with him not only the pots, but also the news that the potter had a daughter of peerless beauty From next day Izat Beg began to go daily to the potter on the pretext of buying his pots This continued for several days, during which secret and sacred love grew up between him and the maiden Then when his whole wealth was expended in purchasing pots he offered himself as a servant in the house of the potter, who employed him for tending his cattle He gave him Mehar as his name Mehar took the cattle every day along the bank and as now and again he called out to the creatures, Suhni heard his voice and prayed in the shrine of his heart, "God, bless Mehar and the cattle" But how long could the fragrance of the rose be hid? The potter came to hear of his servant's affection for his daughter and turned him out-of-door, and to put an end to Suhni's madness he married her to

one Dum, living, in the neighbourhood, in spite of her protest that she had already plighted her troth to Mehar. Dum, too, failed to win her over to himself. But the die had been cast, and she must perforce live in the house of Dum. She, however, remained true to Mehar, whom she remembered hourly, and to give edge and intensity to her feeling of sensing vividly his presence, she passed her hand over the sleek skinned cows and chatted with them! Her companions teased her and twitted her, but she did not mind them. Afterwards every night with the help of a baked and burnt jar she swam to the other side and met her Mehar. This continued for some time when one day a companion, presumably her sister-in-law, suspecting something, made a search one afternoon when Suhni was out and finding a fully baked jar hidden in a corner of her house, replaced it by one the clay of which was not as yet burnt fully. The night came. The river was in flood. Suhni went to the bank with her jar. No sooner had she stepped into the water than she discovered that the jar was unbaked. The jar began to give way. She threw it aside and saying, "Love needs no crutches", plunged into the river. She was caught in a whirlpool, she cried and called out to Mehar, who heard her voice on the other bank but could not move as he was lying wounded. He appealed to one or two persons whom he saw near by to go and save his Suhni, but they declined as the storm spelt sure death. Then he plucked up courage and plunged into the river. Suhni and Mehar met each other on the crest of a wave in the middle of the river, and the stars, being 'wonder-wounded', stopped for a while in their courses, and seemed to sing a *requiem* as the two lovers were lowered by the storm into the watery grave.

I shall not try to interpret the tale and drive home the moral, for to do this would be tantamount to a certain creature's hiding its sting in its tail! It is sufficient that if a story deeply interests one, it has served the highest purpose, and though for some this interest may

be an illusion yet it is one of those illusions, which time burns into an illumination. And it may be stated here that there is something in human nature itself which expects and enjoys such illusions as are conjured up by stories. May this expectation be an upshot of the slight aversion which Man feels to Truth in the abstract and of his desire to have truth presented to him in a manner, which is characterized by what may be called "the human touch"? The story is rich in dramatic effect and as one reads it one enjoys the intensity of its emotional appeal and in some mysterious manner is transported to another region of consciousness, to what the Chinese call "the Kingdom of the Undefined", where truth comes home to the people with that simplicity and unawareness with which Nature ripens her corn and Spring brings her basket of flowers to delight the heart of Man. This is the secret of the appeal which a story makes both to the young and to the old, to the illiterate and to the illumined. Picture then to yourself a concourse of men, women and children sitting under the canopy of heaven and listening to the story related above. Watch them as their faces furnish a moving picture of their emotions, their heads sway sideways, their hands clap and tears trickle down their cheeks. Their hearts are a fire, their souls are illuminated with the light of all lights. And what do their enraptured eyes see,—a spectacle which only a mystic-poet like Shah Latif can project on the lens of their consciousness, when they seem to say in syllables of silence which Sarojini Naidu has woven into words of beauty.

"One look at him is enough for the souls who have awaited his coming for so long, they instinctively recognise the Master—the Master who is full of exquisite gentleness, and hidden strength, through whose deep-set eyes love shines, and so radiant is he, that souls who look into his eyes see God stooping, and showing sufficient of His light for them to rise by, they rise."

True. We rise in reverence when a poet or a mystic

comes to our doors. For, do not we see God standing on his shoulders and stooping to whisper into our ears the word of power, the word which shall take us into the presence of the three-aspected Eternal,—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful? And as we see Him, do not we hear our souls singing:

“Friends, you did not see Him as I saw Him.

He is brighter than the sun and the stars, the moon and the constellations.

He is sweeter than butter, honey and sugar-candy.

“Says, Shah Latif, the Beloved was born within.”

Such is the miracle wrought by a mystic-poet, who is a flute between the lips of the Divine Musician

SACHAL

What was the motive which made man leave Heaven where his Creator and he lived "wrapped and filled by their mutual atmosphere" of affection, where by virtue of his being the heir-apparent he dwelt daily in the pleasanse of Paradise? What impelled him to bid good-bye to Elysian enjoyments? Who can tell? Perhaps, it was the irresistible call of the earth, which actuated him to say to the Father, "It is no gain, thy bondage of love, if it keeps one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth," (*Gitanjali*) Perhaps, there, sitting in the lap of God, he was cloyed by the sweetness of being always in the Beloved's state and he waxed impatient to experience the adventurousness, agony and aspiration of the lover. For, to receive love is a simple task, while the giving of love requires supreme self-sacrifice.

"There I was in the Beloved's state

Here I came to be a lover"—

There may yet be another reason for his departure from the demesne of the gods, namely, his dissatisfaction with the scheme of things, as supplied ready-made to him, and the feeling to re-create the same, through the dynamism of his own love, after his heart's desire. Whatever be the motive which made man to ply his boat in the stormy seas of Self-Knowledge, the fact remains that the reward has been worth the risk. And what has been the reward? Through the illumination of his own love, he has attained to the immortality of the gods. That is the reason why the mystics never die. The flowers on the grave of Napoleon have faded, but those which adorn the resting-place of Kabir are as fresh as ever.

And so once when man has attained to the immensity and ecstasy of integral and illuminated love, he transcends the tyranny of Time and also of the timetable. He says, "I do not know when I was first born

I feel I have always been living” Therefore, when they asked Sachal to tell them when he was born and of what parents, he burst forth into a song

“I was born of none, I was nourished by none I left Heaven because I could not be contained in it, and came down to the dusty earth of my own accord I have neither father nor mother, I am infinite, I am everywhere and it is by mistake that men have called me Sachal”

But that was before he became a mystic The biographical details pertaining to his life, prior to his above realization may, however, be related here in a brief compass He saw the light of day in or about 1750 A D, in the house of one Mian Sahib Dino, who lived at Daraz, in the Khairpur State in Sindh and was christened Abdulwahab Even in his childhood he is said to have been very fond of silence and song And it is reported that whenever he fell ill he cured himself by listening to a sweet song or by seeing a beautiful face Once Shah Latif happened to pass through Daraz Seeing Sachal playing in the street, he inquired of someone nearby whose child he was When the requisite information was furnished to him he placed his right hand on the head of the child and looking into his eyes, said

“The vessel I have put on the fire, its lid will be removed by him”

And the prophecy has been fulfilled to the very letter, because it is Sachal who has played the part of the purveyor of the wine of the Wisdom of Love, which Shah had distilled from the depths of the Persian wine-press

Though Sachal was a lover of the beautiful and of music, he had in him a rich vein of asceticism, too This may be attributed to the influence of his relative, who brought up the boy when the latter's father died, and also to his study of books on philosophy, both in Persian and Arabic, and to his fellowship with fakirs He

seemed to have practised the set discipline of the ethical or orthodox Sufis, because for some time he appears to have been under the spell of self oblivious ecstasy. As he himself says, "Friends, now and again I have been in ecstasy."

But in due course he outgrew the attraction of such exhibitions of psychic skill because one day, when he had attained to maturity, someone pointed to the miracles, which were being performed by a *fakir* in the street, and he said, 'These are but the blandishments of a dancing girl.'

It was his uncle who guided his first steps on the path. "Abdulhaq is the teacher." According to others, it was Guru Gobind Singh, for, at one place Sachal says 'From where has the crest-wearing *yogi* come? Whither does he go? He is all love.'

But this is generally discounted. The fact is that having associated with aspirants of all faiths, he had cultivated an eclecticism and a syncretism, which enabled him to honour and adore the different teachers of humanity. Just as at another place he sings (speaking of Shri Krishna) —

'O wonderful *yogi*, what sweetness was there in the strains of Thy flute!'

This is why he was an enemy of the priests, on whom he hurled his fire and brimstone.

'This puritanical and professional spirituality is untrue. They know nothing of Love.'

And it is said that the priests invited him one day to witness the conversion of a Hindu to Islam. Sachal sat all the time in silence, and when the *finale* of the formal ceremony was reached and the new convert was about to be asked to repeat the *Kalma* (the text from the *Koran*) Sachal rose, red hot with anger, and walked out in protest against the tyranny of the priests, who are but the custodians of the crumbs cast away from the Master's Table of Truth.

It was, however, some time later on that he realized

the Reality, a glimpse of which enabled him to have thereafter a free access to every aspect of manifestation and to see in it but a mirror of the Supreme Spirit of Beauty and Love. One day he was passing through a street. He saw a nightingale in the hands of some children. It had been tied with a thread. It fluttered its wings in its attempt to be free but in vain. This sight impressed him with the truth that Love finds its fulfilment only in the Cross:

"Oh nightingale, speak, why did'st thou leave the rose-gardens and come to this place?" The nightingale laughed and replied, 'Thou knowest it not! He that proclaimed the truth of love has ever met the cross.' "This body and this life is for the Beloved," Sachal says, "and my very being!"

Describing his state of inner illumination on one occasion he exclaimed:

"It was like the coming of the sea into the pitcher".

He had seen the One in the many:

"In the thousands of colours I saw the Beloved without colour".

"All is the beauty of the Beloved."

"The eyes have seen the wonder. Everything is an image of the Beloved."

He felt that God was the Eternal Man:

"Adam is His name, why call Him Allah?"

He had crossed the ocean of forms and seen the Formless One, standing on this bank as well as on the other. He realized that he had come into his own; he was a king, not a slave; nay, the King of Kings Himself:

"You are not a slave, but the king. You know everything, how did you become ignorant? You are yourself the Godhead, why repeat His name? Says Sachal, God is One, without a second, and in this, doubt not."

He came to this realization *via* the threefold discipline of "I am", "I am not" and "I am", described in an earlier chapter,—a discipline in the second stage of which he had to follow the path of heresy. When his own teacher said to him, "Thy first duty is to give up 'faith'. Follow not the road of another, however virtuous he may be, rend the veil over thee. Searcher, expose thy being". And when taking the cue from him he stood up against all formalism and sang outside the mosque on the open road, "Why should I run to Kaaba, when my Master in tavern dwells!" When he attained to the Truth of Love, of "I AM", he said

"When the Reality is manifest the claimant disappears"

He illustrates this by an example

"A man wears a coat, does he name himself a coat? No, he calls himself by the name he bears. The play of the Artist is wonderful. I from the master learnt, 'The sound and the echo are one'. O, Sachal, sunshine is never apart from the sun."

In a beautiful song he sings

"The Dearly-Beloved is in the heart. The nightingale is in the garden of the body. The ocean of love is within. Look for the Beloved deep down in your own self. The flowers are in the garden, the moon, too, is in that garden." Says Sachal, "The Beloved has been known at last! I saw Him in my own heart. Robed in radiance, He came within the ken of my consciousness."

Sachal sometimes employed the medium of Ūrdū—Punjabi, at other times Siraiki and, again, more frequently Sindhi to express himself. He also wrote in Persian and his philosophical treatise, *Diwan Ashkara*, which is in the State Treasury of Khairpur Mirs, is spoken of very highly. He was thus a poet-cum-philosopher. It would be, however, more correct to say that he was a

lyre in the hands of his Master, who played on the instrument as the Spirit moved him

"What am I? Oh what am I? At times I think myself a marionette

Again, at times, the thread that moves the kite "

"Am I the fountain filled by the clouds?

Or am I the reflection of the sun in the pool?"

"What was I there?

What am I here?

Alas! the waves hid the sea, and raging storms did blow

Thus I earned shocks of pain

Ah I see! I left one house to come to another.

But the wave in the sea re-becomes the sea "

"None lighted the candle to see the sun,

All light is of the sun

They understood this and saw the sun

Many and the one are the same, as drops are of the rain

The Master thus spake through him, called Sachal "

"He for whom I sought the readers of the stars,

Beloved! He was with me

He for whom I sought the oracles,

He was with me

He is not a guest but the Beloved and he is always with me

None is so near as He

He for whom I passed sleepless nights

He was with me

I looked for Him here, I looked for Him there,

But looked not for Him in my own being

He for whom I shed tears of separation,

He was with me

O Sachal, seek not far, know thyself

He for whom I was gathering presents,

He was with me "

Towards the end of his life, on which the curtain

fell in 1829, Sachal seemed to believe that when the hour for going to the tryst strikes, the Beloved Punhu will of his own accord come to Sasui, and that there was no need for a strenuous, self-conscious forcing of one's steps on the path leading to the tryst,—the tryst of Truth. The burden of the final stage of his self-realization is contained in the following song, which is to be heard on almost everyone's lips in Sindh

“We have seen *Kaaba* in the heart, what need is there to go to Mecca? My mind is the mosque, why, then, worship in a separate shrine? In every artery is He, why then read the *Kalma*? My Punhal will come to me, of his own accord, why go to Kech? Sachal is smitten already with love, why should he strike himself, then, with a knife?”

And in order that the full significance of the above song may be understood, let me relate the story of Punhu and Sasui,—a story which till this day continues to thrill the hearts of the people of Sindh and the Punjab. Many years ago it was rendered into English verse by a civilian in Sindh. I was fortunate enough to get for a couple of days the loan of the translation from a Bibliophile. The couplets employed in the writing of my version are from this book

Once upon a time there lived a Brahmin. His name was Nao. To his wife was born a daughter of exquisite beauty. And all the people said that she would make the lives of her parents fragrant with love and rich with great good fortune. But the stars in their courses sang otherwise

“Her fate is to a Moslem's joined,
For so it has been willed
Though separations rend your hearts,
Fate's law must be fulfilled.”

Thereupon the father and mother began to weep. “Prestige must be preserved, death is better than dishonour.” Thus they argued and in order to forestall the

decrees of Fate they resolved to send their daughter into exile

"A boat-shaped coffer soon they made
And in it placed the babe .
Their little daughter drest
In gayest infantine array
Then sorely weeping, put her off,
Affianced to the stream "

They watched the coffer float away out of sight The mother's heart began to beat loudly in lamentation, only as a mother's heart can, but he soon consoled himself and his wife with the thought —

"That infant innocence,
Was never without a guardian in a gracious
Providence "

The little bark was decried from afar by a washerman whose name was Mahmud—he was a Mussalman—when one day he was washing the soiled clothes of his clients And he shouted with ineffable joy "Lo! the luck of my life has come at last "

Presently the coffer reached the bank beside which Mahmud stood beating shirts and *shawls* with stick and stone He opened it post-haste and behold! a child of mortality, robed in the immortality of beauty, lay before him, still sealed with the spell of serenity He carried her home and handed her over to his childless wife With a kiss imprinted on the forehead of the child, the wife became a mother She took it in her humble room where with the advent of the little daughter "Everything now wore the semblance of gold"—her soap, her clay, her soda And they christened her Sasui

Years passed Sasui grew into a beauteous maid One day, when her father was feasting his soul on the beauty of his adopted daughter, she said

"Daddy, make me a garden
And in it a summer-house
And give me a spinning-wheel
Adorned with gems of strange device."

The fond father acted accordingly. In a year's time Sasui's little paradise was ready. She lived happily, singing and spinning whole day long. But who can seek to turn the blow from "Fate's unerring hand?"

Now there was a famine in Kech Makran. It was a veritable visitation. Want was writ large everywhere. But Sindh had enough and to spare and so "In Sindh alone the starving folk could needed succour see." The Mahajans of Makran met together and resolved to request the king to allow his son, Punhu, to lead the caravans to Sindh for bringing in grains in exchange for their gold. But the king asked them to have, instead, his Hindu confidant, called the Diwan. They agreed and the caravans started without delay. Ere long they found themselves at Bhambhore where lived Sasui. The Diwan, who was a young and handsome man, became the cynosure of all eyes. So each and every one offered a hospitable fare. Sasui, too, met him and asked

"Sir, are you the chief or own any master?"

The Diwan replied

"I have a chief, Jam Panhu called,

No poet's known comparison will tell you of his face

No painter could portray his form of symmetry and grace

Distracted would you all become were he but in this place"

Thereupon Sasui asked him to bring to Bhambhor this favoured youth, else all the goods his caravans had brought with them would be placed under a ban. And when Beauty commands, who dare disobey? And so the king was approached again, this time with success, and Punhu left Makran with his father's blessings. "To Allah I entrust you, boy, in whom alone is trust"

Then Punhu ordered that with him will have to go to Sindh "supplies of musk, pure and plenty, a thousand silken bags, *doshalas* and *lungis* with fringe and graceful

fold and camels each with nose-piece made of gold and a string of pearls to guide them each "

The day of departure arrived Punhu called his wives, kissed them "mid signs of sore distress" and receiving their parting, precious presents of ten golden *mohurs* each—a visible vow of fidelity—bid them good-bye As the farewell scene was being enacted they noticed two partridges calling each other and the seer thus explained the omen

"A lovers' meeting one 'portends'

The other brings us luck, or loyal mission done "

In due course the caravan reached Kahera Bela, where Sahjan, the goldsmith's wife, "at once with love inflamed", offered him the horn of plenty only if he would stay with her for a night But Punhu knew she was a "wanton, wicked thing" and passed on to his destination She had caressed "as a trophy his very camel's foot-rope". And before many days had passed they found themselves in Bhambhor They pitched their tents there for rest and repose The local world and his wife came to see Punhu and his people And the young maidens went mad over the ravishing, radiant-faced prince from Kech Makran The eyes of their Queen of Love, "whose eyes were constant light", also fell on him

"Her eyes on his, his eyes on hers, what wine could thus inspire?"

It was war, attack without defence,—a sharp exchange of fire"

Punhu was wonderstruck and Sasui turned her steps homeward "Tears fell, he wished to flee the world in loneliness to weep" He was restless and so repaired to the house of his beloved Standing in front of the door, "With skilful arm he drew his bow, and an arrow lodged within" (This was etiquette, in those old days, for announcing one's arrival, no dainty ivory-laid visiting cards were carried inside on a platter by liveried servants)

Mahmud and his wife flew into a rage at this intru-

sion and out came Zainab (this was the name of Mahmud's wife) to chide and chastise but Sasui remonstrated and said

"Oh mother, are you

To scold a guest whose presence here should make us proud and glad!"

Anger gave way to a warm welcome Mahmud asked Punhu what his vocation was

"My lot?" said Punhu, "yours, you wash, I live by washing, too" And straightaway Mahmud pressed him in his service in exchange for bed and board

One day Punhu was given four suits of clothes to be washed but he tore them all to shreds When Sasui brought his midday meal she found him plunged in a perplexing plight She, therefore cheered him up and put a *mohar* each in all the "packs of rags" and Punhu sat down to enjoy his lowly repast When the owners of the suits came, 'The coin tho' dumb, could plead its cause with matchless eloquence," and so they went away satisfied The night came, Punhu made suit to Sasui and she said

! "Love and loving I am yours, will be your wife,

Demand me in betrothal, am I not your own for life?"

And the betrothal was consummated by Mahmud and Zainab with "nine hundred cocoanuts entire, a thousand split in twain, all painted in motley colours" Then the wedding day came and the bagpipe played and the bridegroom distributed large largesses

Hardly had the first flushes of their joy faded when a messenger came from the father of Punhu with the message

"You have washed and whitened *wuggas* (clothes), but blackened our good name"

Punhu wept and sent back the reply

"I will never again return to pitiless Makran" When the messenger returned with the above message to the king, the latter's ire knew no bounds He hit

upon another device, he asked the three brothers of Punhu to go to Bhambhor and persuade him to come back home. They obeyed. On arrival there they were feasted. But the brothers had some mischief up their sleeves. When night came they drugged Punhu and he grew senseless. Then they lifted Punhu like a child, placed him on the back of a saddled camel and carried him to Makran as a trophy in token of their victory.

The morning dawned. Sasui found Punhu's cot empty. She fell into frenzied sorrow and cried:

"No father, mother, kins have to bear me friendship true."

Her friends came to console her and one amongst them addressed her thus:

"Trusting wives, who sleeping potion take,
Will suffer loss like Sasui, why remained she not awake?"

She replied that she never suspected her husband's brothers to be robbers in disguise. Soon afterwards she decided to go in search of her beloved. Her friends dissuaded her but in vain. What did they know of love? And she said, 'None shall guide or follow me; no, let me roam alone.'

She accosted and interrogated the mountains and the trees, the starlit sky and the streams if they knew where her Punhu was. In her heart she sang:

"When Punhu's form appears what joy,
What smiles will Nature wear!"

But none showed her the track he had trodden. She met many Baluchs of her husband's class and country, but only Punhu could set Sasui "from weary bondage free".

One day when her body felt a languor, a robber goat-herd espied her and tried to tempt her into a fall. Helpless as she was she called on the Lord of Love to protect her. And lo!

"The hard ground quak'd beneath her feet,
Hills, rocks were torn asunder;

She sank with grace, as used of old,
To sink in swinging chair"

The goat-herd wondered at this miracle, repented and raised a mound over the spot to serve as Sasui's grave

Months had passed but Punhu felt as restless in Kech Makran as a fish out of water "Why linger here?" said he to himself one day, and set out on his search for Sasui Crossing hills and lakes he reached the mound round which the goat-herd walked and wondered and worshipped every day He questioned him about the pile and was told that it was the grave of a 'beauteous woman, deserted and bereaved' And at once Punhu knew who was meant. And in accents of agony, he cried

"Hast thou a place for me, my love?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed a well-known voice and he rushed to meet his bride

The grave yawned and therein the union of Punhu and Sasui took place Till this day the tomb is decked with fragrant flowers of diverse hues and the cherubim and seraphim hover over and round it over, singing of the Sovereignty of Love

What has been the influence of Sachal over the people of Sindh? Though it is rather difficult to analyse this, or to measure its extent, yet it has to be admitted that the spirit of his song has acted as a sort of a spiritual mid-wife It has helped to bring into being the vague and varied longings of the aspirant for the path, —the Path of Reality Sachal has served the cup of love divine to not a few who dwell in the desert and outside And those who have drunk deep of it have felt in some mysterious manner that they have themselves been transformed into so many cups, from out of each of which one day the Eternal Thirsty Traveller, when He passes by their houses on the road, might just take a sip and slake His thirst All of us have to become cups,—

be it even broken cups—for to drink out of such cups has been the undying longing of our Divine Fellow-Traveller ever since we shook off our feet the fragrant dust of Paradise. Let us, then, keep our cups ready, for who knows when He might knock at our doors and say, "Give me a drink" And woe to us if on the day on which He comes we turn Him away because we have no cups in the house

SOME OTHER MYSTICS OF SINDH

BEKAS

Over half a century ago in Rohri, in Sindh, there lived a Moslem lad by the name of Mohamad Mohsin. He was credited by his neighbours with some eccentricities, one of which was that he never lighted the evening lamp in his house, instead he would sit in the dark and in silence watch the stars, and whenever the spirit moved him he would sing in an ecstatic strain. One day at noon he was passing through one of the streets of the city when he heard a shopkeeper calling out to a Hindu boy, "Kanhaya, Kanhaya". The Moslem's eyes were filled with tears. He ran up to Kanhaya, embraced him and then they both walked down the street together till a turning was reached, when Kanhaya said, "Friend, wait here a while, I shall soon be back". Mohamad Mohsin agreed. Kanhaya went away into one of the by-lanes. Hours passed, Mohamad remained rooted to the spot where Kanhaya had left him and the passers-by asked when the day wore on to evening, "For whom have you been waiting for such a long time?" He wept bitterly and replied, "He promised that he would soon return and so I have been waiting for him."

"For whom?" they inquired.

"For Kanhaya", he rejoined.

"He is an irresponsible lad", they replied, "he must have forgotten all about his promise". Saying this they left him there and passed on. When he realized what had happened he returned home and for the first time he lighted the lamp in his house. And the people wondered, and whenever one of them asked him afterwards, "Why do you light the evening lamp nowadays?", he would reply, "He promised that He would soon come back. I light the lamp lest He might pass by in the dark and I may not be able to see Him."

And day after day and night after night he would sit in the doorstep, waiting for the sound of Kanhaya's footsteps. The pain of longing daily grew deeper till, at last, it consumed him when he attained to the twenty-first year of his life. The world said that he was dead, but God felt otherwise, for He knows the eternal law, that death is the door which opens out on the limitless life. This young man had lost his own ego to such an extent that he was known amongst the people of Rohri as *Bekas*,—the ego-less. The songs which he composed and sang when the spirit moved him were often heard by his neighbours and sung by them to others. The villagers round about Rohri sing these songs till this day. These have, however, never been published, though some of Prof. T. L. Vaswani's admirers have collected these and reduced them to writing and given the manuscript to him. He has written and published a couple of articles on the poet-singer, *Bekas*, and therein given a few specimens of the latter's songs, in English translation:

"The longing for the Homeland
Draws tears, day and night."

"Beloved, this is the tragedy:
That to see Thee is to be slain."

"The King thou art in quest
Is in thine own heart."

"The Beloved is come to my country,
O Comrades,
Give me your greetings today."

"He awakes, whom the Beloved awakes;
None else, none else."

BEDIL

Before *Bekas* there lived another mystic *Kadarbux*, known as *Bedil*, (one who had given away his heart), about whose life not much is known except that his songs are sung by a large number of the people of the province. Here is a song of his in the English translation, done by a friend:

"Renounce all care of life if thou wouldst
 drink the draught of love, to avoid the
 knife shows but rawness of thy life (love),
 Oh, turn not away thy face from Death,
 Come, keep thy head beneath the chopping,
 Break all ropes that bind thee to earth,
 Bedil says, listen to this advice,
 If thou makest love, be faithful to the last "

DARYAKHAN

Some of the Sufis had a philosophic bias, as for example, Daryakhan and Rohal. A friend of mine in Hyderabad has collected a few of their songs and sent me the English translation of several, stray verses

"When I perceive the Beloved in my heart, there is no form. It is only the fulness of love "

"I accept no past, I long not for the future, for perception is ever and ever new "

"When the echo of the Beloved reached my ears, they entered the world of wonder and heard nothing else "

"Those maidens, that come out in the open, near to them is the door of the Beloved. They be not with the Bridegroom who remain in veils "

"She freed herself from self and saw that all the land was His "

"As the eyes go on seeing, the Beloved grows more and more distant

"As I go on forgetting myself the Beloved unveils himself "

"He that loving the Lord gave up *Kāshī*, he forgot every care and anxiety "

"Light will come to thee from longing "

"Lovers do not stand in *Kaaba* they bow their heads in the shrine of the heart, Mecca is not without, but within them. Their soul is on pilgrimage every moment "

SONGS OF SHAHU, ROHAL'S BROTHER

"Brother, I move in such a home, where there is neither we, nor you, neither is there all this world"

"The dweller lives not in three realms Ours is the realm, the fourth, its name is 'City without a sorrow'"

There were also a few other mystic singers

SONGS OF DALPAT

"In everything dost Thou abide, why hast Thou then concealed Thyself? Thou thyself actest righteously and otherwise, why hast Thou then created heaven and hell? Thou art the Truth, why then, didst Thou have Mansur crucified?"

"Beloved, come and see what has happened to me, I have become a stranger to sleep and to comfort With just a glance, Thou hast bewitched me and ever since I have, Majnun-like, been wearing out my heart for thee, I have become like the bee which wanders in the woods in search of the lotus, I have become like the moth which hovers round and round the light of thy love O Beloved, seeing Thee, I have fallen madly in love with Thee"

SONGS OF KUTUB

"Be merciful to me, O good and generous friend Many are the supplicants at your door, but none ever returned from there I am but one of them You are the only remedy for my ills, no other physician do I know You know the condition of my heart Have mercy on Kutub, O Lord,—there is none beside you,—and snap all the ties of my sorrow"

And here is a folk-song

"Come back, O Beloved, to the country of my heart, I shall kiss your feet and pass them over my eyes I ever live in expectancy, I never despair and so I spread a seat for you every day and make it fragrant with musk I daily pine for you and like the moth I burn for you, I am on fire with longing, I always ask the passers-by about you, I daily shed tears, and look out on the road and inquire about you from the visitors from the far-off country."

SUFISM IN SINDH TODAY

In the previous chapters I have tried to give you a sketchy survey of Sufism in Sindh from its beginning in the fourteenth century to the present day. It has been my endeavour,—I do not know if I have succeeded in this,—to take the reader into the very heart of Sindh. And what better avenue of approach to the heart of a person or a people could one have than their songs? It was not an exaggeration when a great writer of the West said, "Tell me the songs of the people and I shall tell you all about them"

But what of Sufism today? Does it still continue to influence the dwellers of the desert of Sindh towards a burning passion for truth and a re-orientation to the ideal that it is better to be an outcast votary of truth than a priest in the temple,—the localised, limited footstool for Him who is all-pervading and infinite? The answer is, I am afraid, in the negative. For the past two decades, the poison of selfish and divisible politics has entered the body of the Sindh and made a stranger of the brother. The Moslem and the Hindu are not living on any appreciable terms of amity and affection, they think nowadays more of the ballot-box than of the cup of love. The result is a certain crystallization in the thinking and acting modes of the people. It would seem that just as in the individual there is the latent spirit of non-conformity, there is also a spirit of conformity, of crystallization, which ever sings, "Toe the line, toe the line". This evil is to be met with more in the cities than in the villages, which are still sound at the core, though it must be admitted that the infection is spreading rather fast into the interior. Sometimes when I feel deeply pained at what is happening in the province I ask myself, 'Is it now time for the bird which sits on the tree of life to be lost in the

cloying sweetness of its own enjoyment? Why is the other bird, which is sitting a little higher than this bird, silent?" And there are occasions when I begin to despair of the vitalizing impact of the spirit of seeking,—Spirit of Synthesis, of Harmony, of Love, of Wholeness—usually called Sufism—on the life of the people. Then it is that at such times I hear the Genius of the Desert, saying in the language of the dust-storm and of the still, starry night:—"Victory to Truth, Victory to Truth."

SOME OF THE MYSTICS I HAVE MET

It was Friday afternoon. There were huge crowds in the mosque. After the prayer was over, the *maulvi* preached a sermon, in the course of which he quoted a couplet from Kabir. The eyes of the congregation were aflame with anger and the worshippers whispered to one another, "What is the matter with the *maulvi* today? Has he gone mad? For, he has cited the words of a *Kafir*!" The sermon was brought to a hurried close, for the *maulvi* knew that a storm had been brewing for some time. And, crying aloud *Allah -o-Akbar*, he walked out of the mosque and went home. The congregation refused to show the usual respect to the dignitary and he knew that his days as an ecclesiastic were numbered.

The storm grew during the night both in intensity and in extent. When the hour for the *muezzin* to call the devout to the morning prayer drew near, a messenger came to his (*maulvi's*) house to tell him that somebody else would perform the prescribed ritual and that he should present himself before the Council of Elders at noon. The *maulvi* saluted the messenger saying, "Thank you for unfastening the door."

The clock-tower struck twelve. The mosque was one vast sea of human faces. The Chairman of the Council called upon the *maulvi* to explain to the congregation why he had departed from the beaten track and quoted a couplet of a *Kafir* and that, too, in Hindi, which is a language on which God evidently did not look with any degree of favour, else the *Koran* would not have been written in Arabic.

Every one turned his face towards the spot where the *maulvi* stood and eagerly awaited his answer. The *maulvi* bowed to the congregation and in a voice, which betrayed firmness and fervour, said, "O Beloved Ones of God, if your God knows only Arabic then He cannot be

the God of the whole world,—at least not my God” Saying this, he bowed again to the people present there and walked out the *mosque*. The congregation was spell-bound, and when the spell was broken they discovered, to their great dismay, that the culprit had fled away, without giving them an opportunity to fire their explosives of expletives at him.

The door was flung open that day and he walked forth into the light that illuminates the whole world. He had such expansive affection and broad-minded catholicity that he attracted to himself, during the years that followed, hundreds of admirers belonging to all communities and creeds and colours. He did not wear any ochre-coloured robe, nor did he become a factory for manufacturing disciples. He went about in an ordinary dress and earned a living by selling some Urdu books every day in one of the by-lanes of Bombay, where he had a small shop. Any one who visited his shop even once felt so much drawn to him that thereafter he would find some pretext or other to go to him. He spent the nights all alone in a small room in a big building. He would sit silent, while the rosary of remembrance was being told in the heart. His book-selling business was also, one day he remarked, one of the many rosaries he told daily, nay, hourly.

“Why did you engage yourself in this mundane matter of making a living?’, some of his admirers once said to him, “we shall be only too glad to keep you in comfort, so that you could spend your whole time in devotions”

But this book selling is also a kind of devotional exercise. Work is worship, worship is work. Moreover, a seeker should always see to it that the fragrance of the rose-scent is hidden within a cotton plug, lest he might lapse into subtle self conceit.”

“Did you have any sorrows in your life? If so, how did you face them and yet attained to poise and peace of mind?”

He has taken it upon Himself to feed and clothe His whole creation, the only stipulation to which we agreed being that we shall seek Him before the sun sets in the west. The day has passed in enjoying the shouts and shows of the fair and we return home only to find that darkness has overtaken us. Fie on us,—we are faithless, to the core!

Of what avail are books? Man does not live by them alone, nor by bread. He needs the schooling and sustenance of love. It is the greatest reality. Were it not so, the Beloved should not have made the cross His bed-stead, nor the lover would have made of his self a sieve and a skeleton.

We are fond of the market-place. We are adepts in the tricks of the trader. We are ever begging for more and more. We ask God for the morrow's provision but we never pay for it in advance in terms of added aspiration.

Reward is the *summum bonum* of the man of the world. Every minute of his wakefulness he spends in learning the wizardry of wealth. But to the lover, his simplehearted faith in the faithfulness of the Beloved is all-in-all. Only let the seeker be sincere.

We go to an apothecary for an ointment for our wounds. We forget that the Physician is in us and that His panacea for all the ills of life is pain!"

He stopped speaking. And we rose from our seats to take our leave of him. He blessed us and we wended our ways homewards. And all the time there was ringing in my ears the refrain of the song:

"What, if one has tasted the nectar of immortality! He who never loved, never lived truly. Let a man be encyclopaedic in his learning but, if like the infant he has not tasted of love, all has been a vanity and vexation."

The stars in the sky smiled at me as I sang the song. And the rose and the jasmine beckoned to me to follow the flute.

"My refuge", he replied, "all along has been the Name of Allah"

' 'Do you mean that you repeat His Name and difficulties disappear? Such a prescription has at least never helped us to cure ourselves of our ills "

"Not repetition, but remembrance, not separation but union, not duality but unity" was his laconic answer

' We do not understand you," they rejoined

He remained silent for a moment, and then remarked, ' Whenever you have any suffering or sorrow, sit in the open under the starry sky or by the seashore or on a hill, and you will receive sympathy from them "

2

In his eyes dwelt the beauty of the Beloved, his stature had the stateliness of the mountain, his forehead was the footstool of the All-Highest and his face and figure had the grace of the fawn. He sat on a prayer carpet, in the house of a fellow-seeker when I went to see him. I saluted him and sat by his side

All of a sudden it began to rain in torrents. And the saint's spring of silence gushed forth in a flow of simple speech

"It is raining. It is the rain of God's grace. The very specks of dust are being bathed in the light of his longing. Down in the depths of the sea, there is the oyster, today, it has heard the news of the coming of the rains. Who conveyed this to him? His mouth is wide open. Only let the raindrop touch it and it will be transmuted into a priceless pearl

But in these days who learns or listens to the piteous plaint of love? Everyone is rushing after the acquisition of learning. And this learning is like a curtain which separates man from the constant companionship of the Beloved. All are wearing themselves out with care and craving for comfort. Who ever cries for a niche in the pantheon of pain, in the sanctuary of seeking?

He has taken it upon Himself to feed and clothe His whole creation, the only stipulation to which we agreed being that we shall seek Him before the sun sets in the west. The day has passed in enjoying the shouts and shows of the fair and we return home only to find that darkness has overtaken us. Fie on us,—we are faithless to the core!

Of what avail are books? Man does not live by them alone, nor by bread. He needs the schooling and sustenance of love. It is the greatest reality. Were it not so, the Beloved should not have made the cross His bed-stead, nor the lover would have made of his self a sieve and a skeleton.

We are fond of the market-place. We are adepts in the tricks of the trader. We are ever begging for more and more. We ask God for the morrow's provision but we never pay for it in advance in terms of added aspiration.

Reward is the *summum bonum* of the man of the world. Every minute of his wakefulness he spends in learning the wizardry of wealth. But to the lover, his simplehearted faith in the faithfulness of the Beloved is all-in-all. Only let the seeker be sincere.

We go to an apothecary for an ointment for our wounds. We forget that the Physician is in us and that His panacea for all the ills of life is pain!"

He stopped speaking. And we rose from our seats to take our leave of him. He blessed us and we wended our ways homewards. And all the time there was ringing in my ears the refrain of the song:

"What, if one has tasted the nectar of immortality! He who never loved, never lived truly. Let a man be encyclopaedic in his learning but, if like the infant he has not tasted of love, all has been a vanity and vexation."

The stars in the sky smiled at me as I sang the song. And the rose and the jasmine beckoned to me to follow the flute.

3

"For about a quarter of a century, day in and day out, I have sung and played to my master, the King, and in return, have been rewarded with many a precious possession and also made a recipient of several signets of his recognition of my merit. But alas! as yet I have never had that joyousness of the Spirit which is the fruition of all true work. Perhaps, that is a blessing which, 'like the quality of mercy cannot be strained' Oh, for the grace of God!"

Thus, of an evening sat soliloquizing a court musician, whose skill in the co-ordination of the chords of his stringed instrument was as much the wonder of the local world as his cultured voice. He had grown grey in the service of the Muse. His white, flowing beard matched well with the silvery white of the moonlight outside. In his shining eyes there was the aspiration of excelsior, while his face was a facade of failure, which is more glorious than the much-vaunted success of the gold-rolled millionaire or the self-conscious specialist.

The evening was far advanced into the night, his disappointment deepened into disgust. Then the muezzin called the faithful to prayer, and the temple-bells pealed forth the worship of the Silent One. And still he sat there where his wife had left him overnight to his own musings and meditation.

"It is time," said his wife who was surprised to see him in that posture of pensiveness, "you got ready to go to the Court. Today it is the King's birthday and you know you have to appear before him in and at your best."

"I am not going there today," he replied. "I have made up my mind to resign my gilt edged job."

"What?" queried his life's comrade in a voice in which there was anger as well as interjection. "Do you want me and your children to starve? Shall I in my old age go out in rags and beg for food?"

"The die is cast. He who feeds the sparrows and who made the parrot green and the peacock of variegated

feathers will feed also you and me. Please call Karimbuksh. I want him to take my letter of resignation to His Highness."

The wife burst into torrential tears, for the thought of the morrow worried and wounded her. When she recovered from her state of frenzied anxiety, she walked out of her husband's presence to do his bidding.

Karimbuksh presented himself before his master within a few minutes.

"Karim, take this letter and give it to the Maharaja Sahib personally."

Karimbuksh took the letter from his master's hand, saluted and departed on his mission with mercurial speed. He had no difficulty in obtaining entry into the palace, for he was as well-known amongst the members of the King's menial staff as his master was among the courtiers. When he reached the Maharaja's room he knocked at the door, and with a bend of his knee and a bow of his head, delivered his trust and returned home.

The Maharaja opened the letter hurriedly, and as he scanned through the contents his hair stood on end and his lips pursed up in paroxysms of indignation. The resignation read as under:

"All these years I have served the King with my song, but now my soul is intent on serving with song the King of Kings. No more shall the painted pomp of the court be my stage; my dwelling now will be the river bank and my 'fit and few' audience, the tides of the ocean and the murmur of the forest."

For a while His Highness stood rooted to the spot; then his pent-up anger found vent in a crescendo of abuse. The top-most note was attained when he shouted, "Ungrateful cur, this is how you want to reward me for my paternal patronage of you. What a fool I was that I fed a snake on snow-white milk!"

The sun was at its meridian; the birthday celebrations were at their height. The existence of the court musician was forgotten like a bad dream, for such are

the ways of sovereigns and their sycophants, of princes and their parasites. The idols of yesterday are but the anachronisms of today!

Years rolled on. The musician lived in an humble hut on the bank of a river. His family had been taken away from him by the Angel of the Dark Face. His sole companion now was his instrument. He would welcome with it the dawn in the east as he would the stars of the night. Words, he felt, would mar his union with the Master, so he never sang as accompaniment.

One day as he sat watching the play of the waves, he began to sing:

"Ferryman, lead me across."

The song gripped him; he was lost in the ecstasy of singing. The song continued: "Whither, traveller, whither?"

"To the palace of the king,

The King—the King of Kings."

And as he sang the last verse, his eyes were filled with a far-off vision, his countenance grew radiant and his body lambent. The world said, "He is dead," but the angels in Heaven sang triumphantly. "He lives, he lives, he lives." Then I heard a sound which seemed to be a clap of hands. It was the Creator clapping His cheer,—of welcome and of wonder.